“Cotton — it’s not a plant, it’s politics”

The system of forced labour in Uzbekistan’s cotton sector

Evidence from
the 2011 cotton harvest

“Cotton — it’s not a plant, it’s politics”

The system of forced labour in Uzbekistan’s cotton sector

Berlin, 2012

Dedicated to those human rights defenders and journalists whose efforts have raised awareness around the world of the extent of forced labour in Uzbekistan.

1 The defoliation tractor spraying highly toxic defoliant on the cotton plants is in use while cotton pickers are present.

9 Introduction

What does cotton mean for Uzbekistan
13

Mobilizing the population to pick cotton: how it happens
18

Children in the cotton fields
23

23 System of mobilization
23 Labour conditions and payment
24 You don't send the children to pick cotton? Enemy of the People!
26 To cotton, like to war — there are victims
26 Teachers in dual roles — victims and taskmasters
31 Where is the revenue from the export of cotton? Schools without heat

Adults and students in the cotton fields
32

32 Adult forced labour
32 Mahallas as the driving force in the mobilization of adults
33 Now the residents of the capital are cotton slaves
35 It's only a "student practice"
37 Life in the field encampments — "This is not a life!"

Corruption during the cotton campaign
38

Farmers — also victims of coercion
39

39 Cotton — forced cultivation
41 Arbitrary power

Suppression of information about forced labour
45

47 Conclusions and recommendations
49 About us
49 Glossary
50 German translation

The class teacher comes into the classroom and announces: “We have received an order — everyone will go to the cotton harvest. School will be closed for you until October 1st. And then, after that date, we’ll see what’s next”. “Why until the 1st of October? How can you believe it?” — we asked incredulously.

“They say that from October 1, there will be rainfall and then now”, — the class teacher responded. And then we all came in on September 11th at 7am to the school. We came with packed lunches and canteens of drinking water.

9th grade student,
Zamin district, November 2011

2

3

4

2 “Everybody went to pick cotton. The market will be working from 7pm till 6am.” Ferghana, 2009.
3 “Cotton is our wealth, protecting it is our duty.”
4 The market is closed. “Everybody went to pick cotton, market will be working from 7pm till 6am”.

Uzbekistan's cotton production apparatus is controlled by the state and is a system that is based on the cheap forced labour of millions of people who have nothing to do with the cotton industry. Annual surveys indicate that the state authorities are guilty of exploiting child labour. Every autumn, the Government of Uzbekistan, operating through the local authorities — regional and district hokimiyats — have forcibly mobilized millions of children, students, teachers, state employees, and employees of private businesses to do manual labour, picking cotton in the fields. The country's Prime Minister, Shavkat Mirziyoev, is personally involved in the cotton campaign, as he oversees the agricultural sector. He conducts regular conference calls with local hokimiyats that bring in a range of ministries and agencies, including the prosecutor's office and law enforcement, to the cotton campaign. The large scale mobilization of forced labour of adults and children in Uzbekistan should be seen not only within the context of the country's command economy that has remained in place since the Soviet era, but also as a consequence of its authoritarian system of governance. Parents are no longer in a position to protect their children, as they themselves are subject to deeply rooted administrative coercion that pervades the entire society, from the country's local government and self-governance structures, and even to the hearts and minds of citizens — through the ongoing brainwashing by the country's propagandistic mass media. The combination of fear and propaganda recalls the Stalinist system, which has been preserved by Uzbekistan's current government.

In a democratic government that has a free media and independent civil institutions, this kind of mass exploitation of the population would be impossible. An exploitative system has become the standard modus operandi in Uzbekistan, and it is maintained and reinforced with the assistance of the country's security structures. For the country's adults — to refuse to labour in the fields means to suffer the threat of the loss of employment, withdrawal of pension or social welfare. Threats and psychological, pressure work well on parents. Despite the dangers to their children's health, and the lack of adequate compensation — due to the low payment for harvesting cotton, parents, in the end, cannot prevent their children from going to the cotton fields from year to year, where they are exposed to toxic agrochemicals (pesticides and defoliants), hard labour, and abuse.

Since the time of the Soviet Union, Uzbekistan's cotton industry has used child labour. But even then, it was not used as extensively as it is today, two decades after Uzbekistan's independence. In the late Soviet period, roughly half of the country's cotton was machine picked. The Soviet government invested heavily in the mechanization of the cotton industry, thereby reducing the demand for forced manual labour. Since Uzbekistan's independence, the government has dismantled the domestic manufacture of cotton harvester combines and other agricultural machinery, preferring instead to import machinery from the West — a practice, which has proven to be unsustainable. Due to the effect of price scissors, farmers simply cannot afford expensive imported machinery and most cotton is picked manually so that the demand for forced labour has increased dramatically.

The need for structural changes in Uzbekistan's cotton sector is long overdue. However, the central government has demonstrated a complete lack of political will to push forward the much-needed reforms that could significantly improve living standards of the country's rural populations, and release a large part of the population from their "cotton duties." It is obvious that the administrative-command system in the agricultural sector, which has barely changed since the Soviet era, is a very comfortable one for the country's elites who can maximally enrich themselves from the system in which they control the production and sale of cotton. It is because of this that reform in the sector has not advanced.

The Uzbek government's systematic exploitation of schoolchildren and students not only violates human rights, but actually condemns the young generation to a future of

“We have received an order — everyone will go to the cotton harvest. School will be closed for you until October 1. And then, after that date, we’ll see what’s next”. “Why until October 1? How can you believe it?” — we asked incredulously. “They say that from October 1, there will be rainfall and then snow”, — the class teacher responded. And then we all came in on September 11 at 7am to the school. We came with packed lunches and canteens of drinking water.

9th grade student,
Zamin district, November 2011

Dear residents of our Mahalla! We hope for your understanding of the situation and sense of responsibility before the Motherland. You know it very well, for every citizen of Uzbekistan cotton — is everything: it is the bread and it is the salt on your table, it is the clothes you wear. And for these reasons, we urge you to take an active part in gathering the cotton harvest, and hope that you, together with your family, will gather 1000 kilograms of cotton and will submit your certification of this to the mahalla committee.

Appeal from the makhalla committee
to its residents.

illiteracy, servitude, and a vicious cycle of poverty. The distribution of the profits from the export of cotton has no citizen oversight. It is impossible to investigate what from the export revenues goes back into the state budget, and what lands in the personal bank accounts of those who are close to the country's president.

The practice of forced labour in Uzbekistan is a violation of the country's own laws as well as the international conventions on labour and human rights to which Uzbekistan is a signatory. In 2008, the country adopted the law *On Guarantees of the Rights of the Child*, the second article of which permits children to work only for educational purposes on the condition that it does not harm the health and development of the child and this is only for children over the age of 14, at that. Only once they are 16 years old or over, young people are allowed to acquire a paying job. Despite the law, schoolchildren under age 16 are sent to work in the fields for full eight hour work days, seven days a week, without proper food, and sent to live in appalling and unhygienic living conditions.

Uzbekistan has signed and ratified the following international documents prohibiting forced and child labour:

> Convention on the Rights of the Child, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, International Labor Organization (ILO)
> ILO Convention Nº 129 On Forced Labour
> ILO Convention Nº 105 On the Abolition of Forced Labour
> ILO Convention Nº 138 On the Minimum Age of Employment
> ILO Convention Nº 182 On the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor.

None of these conventions are implemented in Uzbekistan. The ILO Committee on the Application of Standards, twice in 2010 and 2011 has indicated that Uzbekistan violated these conventions, but the Uzbek government didn't respond to these criticisms, rather, they denied the existence of forced labour or they responded by introducing new bureaucratic measures and documents that have actually had no real impact on the actual situation on the ground.

This report is part of a series of papers on forced labour in Uzbekistan published by the School of Oriental and African Studies and the Centre for Governance and Geopolitical Studies of the Grenoble Business School. These papers have all been based on field research conducted during and after the cotton harvests.●

This report presents the results of a small survey conducted by our organization in autumn of 2011, which have shown, that the forced labour of schoolchildren, students, and state workers is widespread in almost all of the provinces in Uzbekistan where cotton is grown. Over the course of the research, we conducted 130 interviews with schoolchildren, their parents, students from lyceums and colleges, teachers, and farmers. The chart below shows the distribution of informants by their categories and provinces where the interviews were taken. (see page 14)

The provinces' names are not disclosed to avoid the risks of identifying those who have carried out this fieldwork research. It is done for their safety, as Uzbek authorities do not tolerate independent research in the country, especially on such sensitive issues as forced labour.

The interviews were conducted in November and December 2011 in seven provinces of the country. The ages of the respondents who were schoolchildren and students ranged from 10 to 16. The local researchers, who conducted the survey, took over 300 photographs and several hours of video documentation to provide evidence of a massive campaign to mobilize people to pick cotton during the harvest season in autumn of 2011. Some of these photographs and videos can be found on our website.●●

● *Invisible to the World? The Dynamics of Forced Child Labour in the Cotton sector of Uzbekistan,* SOAS: London, 2009, http://www.soas.ac.uk/cccac/events/cotton-sector-in-central-asia-2005/file49842.pdf; *What has changed. Progress in eliminating the use of forced child labour in the cotton harvests of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan,* SOAS: London, 2010, http://www.soas.ac.uk/cccac/centres-publications/file66906.pdf; *Forced child labour in the cotton sector in Uzbekistan: Some Changes — but not for the Better,* Centre d'Etudes en Géopolitique et Gouvernance: Grenoble, 2012, http://www.centregeopolitique.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=64&Itemid=194&lang=fr.

●● http://uzbekgermanforum.org/category/media/photos (retrieved on 09/19/2012)

What does cotton mean for Uzbekistan

The agricultural sector of Uzbekistan employs over 44% of the working population, which consists of 7,125,000 people,• with the cotton industry being one of the key export oriented sectors of Uzbekistan's economy. Uzbekistan is one of the world leaders in the global cotton market, ranking sixth for production of cotton and fifth for export of cotton. Every year, the country grows an average of 3,5 to 3,7 million tons of raw cotton and produces 1 to 1,2 million tons of cotton fiber. Uzbek cotton is primarily exported to countries such as China, Russia, Iran, Bangladesh, South Korea, and Vietnam. Some Uzbek cotton is purchased by European companies in Germany, the UK, Switzerland, Belgium, and France. In addition, about three hundred thousand tons of cotton is sold in local markets to the textile industry, and some of their products are sold to Western markets.

According to the data of Uzbekistan's Ministry of Agriculture and Water, cotton may take up as much of 40% of Uzbekistan's arable land. In comparison, grain crops (wheat, rice, etc.) occupy 44.9% of the land, and potatoes, vegetables, and melons taken together — 7.4%. Cotton fiber is the second most exported item from the Republic, and the state is the sole seller of the cotton, the proceeds of which, annually, are over 1 billion USD.••

Immediately following the cotton season, in his congratulatory message to Uzbek cotton growers who in 2011, raised over 3.5 million tons of cotton, President Islam Karimov, said that according to preliminary estimates, the year's gross income from cotton production would exceed 2,400 billion soums (USD 1,365,000,000), or 25% more in comparison with the previous year. "This, in turn, no doubt, will create tremendous opportunities for the further improvement of our villages across the country, building new schools, academic lyceums and professional colleges, modern medical facilities, children's sports facilities, social infrastructure and housing in short, for the further growth of our people's welfare and the prosperity of Uzbekistan" — Karimov said.••• However, the government does not hold itself accountable to its people in terms of explaining where that USD 1 billion, derived from the export of cotton, goes. Due to the lack of transparency and accountability of public finances and export revenues, Uzbek society has no awareness of how export revenues are used and whether they are contributing to the well-being of the nation and its development.

Already from the beginning of 2012, the tone of the President's speeches changed, becoming grim. "The losses to Uzbekistan's agriculture in 2011 amounted to USD 110 million", — Islam Karimov announced at a state meeting that took place on January 19, 2012. In his report to the Cabinet of Ministers on the main achievements of 2011, the president noted that in the previous year, over 3800 farming enterprises did not meet their contractual obligations for the production of cotton, resulting in the state's non-delivery of over 160 thousand tons, valued in excess of 120 billion soums. "If this is made into cotton-fiber, which can be prepared for export, then the loss will be roughly 100 million USD, not counting losses due to the lost production of oil, meal, hulls, and other products," — Karimov said.

In his declarations, the president acknowledged the challenge, yet he still did not get to the root of the problem — distortions or "padding" (pripiska) in the reports on cotton harvest yields. From his words, we can conclude that he initially was given the (incorrect) amount of 160 thousand tons, which may be why the president's mood took a turn for the worse. The problem takes root in the command-administrative system prevailing in the cotton industry, which serves as a soil for omnipresent pripiskas. It is worth mentioning that in the mid-1980s, during the Soviet era, the Kremlin launched a massive criminal investigation that revealed that out of 5 million tons of harvested raw cotton reported by the Uzbek leadership one million tons was pripiska. Since then, little has changed to discourage local officials and cotton industry functionaries from the systemic practice of pripiska.

• Source: Association of Farming Enterprises of Uzbekistan, 2012.

•• Source: Ministry of Water and Agriculture of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2012.

••• Press-Service of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 10/21/2011, http://press-service.uz/ru/news/show/pozdravleniya/hlopkorobam_i_vsem_trudyashimsya_uzbe_2/ (retrieved on 09/19/2012)

In this command-administrative system, farmers are de jure supposed to be independent entrepreneurs, but de facto are subordinate to the state and its local representatives, the provincial and district hokims, who remain personally responsible for the delivery of fixed amounts of cotton. This, in turn, subjects farmers completely to the power of the state's repressive administrative apparatus, should they fail to meet the quotas assigned to them. Farmers are required to meet the assigned quotas or face criminal charges for misuse of land or not paying off the bank loans. These punishments can even include physical beatings or criminal prosecution.

One effect of this command-administrative system established in the cotton industry is that deception and misinformation pervades all state bodies, including the reports of the Uzbekistan government to international institutions on the state of forced and child labour in the country. As one farmer put it, "If you don't lie — you won't survive." This is the rule by which the entire state apparatus lives, including the president himself. Under these conditions, the authorities will only genuinely approach structural reforms in the cotton sector and the agricultural sector at large, when they themselves feel the danger of losing income from the export of cotton to world markets.

Province	Parents	Children	Teachers	Farmers	Total
Province A	6	6	2	3	17
Province B	—	12	10	12	34
Province C	6	6	4	6	22
Province D	6	6	4	6	22
Province E	2	2	1	1	6
Province F	10	6	4	6	26
Province G	—	—	—	3	3
Total	30	38	25	37	130

5

6

5 Empty local market
6 Organizing buses taking harvesters to the fields

7

8

7 College Students in Angren City going to the cotton
8 Loading goods and belongings of the cotton pickers onto trucks before heading out to the fields, which are sometimes miles away from the homes of the harvesters. Tashkent Region

For those schools unable to cope with the daily production requirements, the school director was immediately dismissed by the head of the Rayono [district-level department of education], who decided to use students from the sixth and seventh grades. Of course, the head of the Rayono informed the head of the district prosecutor's office... But the prosecutor responded: "I don't know anything about it. And I don't want to know anything about it. And if a situation arises in connection with the use of sixth and seventh graders, I will not spare you. Know this. For now, while there is an opportunity, do what you like. However, I will require from you the daily production outputs regularly..."

A teacher from Jizzak,
November 2011

The district hokim met with our teachers out in the fields. He had just discovered that the school should take 100 people to the fields, but that only 70 were there, and had, by lunchtime, only collected 700 kilograms. The hokim started to shout at the teachers in front of the students and ordered the director to show up to a meeting that evening. In the morning, the school director showed up with a black eye, as the evening before he was beaten by the hokim and the prosecutor...

Parent, Jizzak province,
November 2011

The director returned from the district and that he participated in a conference call with Prime Minister Shavkat Mirziyoev, where Mirziyoev announced the launch of the cotton picking season. After the meeting, the district hokim called the head of the Rayono and other activists. The head of the Rayono told all school directors that they should wait for him, and he went back to into the meeting. We waited for him at the Rayono's office. Then he returned to us and announced: "On September 11 the cotton harvest will begin for eighth and ninth graders, who will be taken away from their classrooms."

Instructor from a middle school, Jizzak province,
November 2011

Mobilizing the population to pick cotton: how it happens

The cotton campaign in autumn 2011, as in campaigns from previous years, was conducted with the participation of people from almost all parts of Uzbek society, with the widespread use of child labour and the forced mobilization of students and employees of state enterprises, medical personnel and teachers, and even merchants and employees from the private sector. Transportation companies were forced to provide buses to shuttle people. At the time of the cotton campaign, from the beginning of September through the end of November, life in Uzbekistan's towns and villages went silent: the classrooms in the schools, colleges, and universities were empty, hospitals didn't take in patients, bazaars were shut, stores were closed, and public transportation operated sporadically. The scene looked like life during wartime, and is a familiar scene, repeated from year to year.

The main objective of the cotton campaign in 2011, like previous years, is for the local authorities to achieve the following: to fulfill the state plan for the cotton harvest, and to do so in the shortest time possible so as to ensure that all the higher grade cotton is picked during the few dry days of autumn.

To do so, the hokims (governors) of the provinces and districts enlist the support of the prosecutor's office and of law enforcement. For the last few years, at the instructions of the Prime Minister, the prosecutor's office, law enforcement, and sometimes the Uzbekistan's National Security Services (the successor to the KGB), actively participate in all processes related to cotton production, enforcing orders to mobilize the population to the cotton fields and preventing information about forced labour from leaking to the international press. It has become a common phenomenon when the prosecutor becomes the "authorized person" responsible for the fulfillment of the district and provincial plan for the cotton harvest. And he has no other way to achieve the plan other than through threats of criminal prosecution against those who fail to fulfill their part of the plan. Thus the daily meetings of those tasked with responsibility over the harvest may include figures such as the head of the prosecutor's office and the police chief. Physical assaults are common at these meetings. Public humiliation and beatings of farmers or school principals or someone else from the lower ranks are also common.

Prosecutors, endowed by the Constitution with authority over ensuring compliance with the law, themselves violate the Constitution and international law, as they are complicit in the illegal processes of forced labour and exploitation.

In the autumn of 2011, the district authorities took all measures to collect cotton as quickly as possible. To do so, additional labour was brought in by using labour from Tashkent (more about this below).

The government forced women receiving maternity benefits from the makhalla, to go out to the fields to pick cotton, and leave their children unattended. Even religious leaders were required by the authorities to pitch in with the harvest. Clergy from the mosques were tasked with encouraging worshippers in their sermons to participate in the nationwide "hasher," and that they themselves should go to pick cotton to set a good example for their congregants.

Every kindergarten and every school, every business and every organization, every factory and every makhalla, every military unit and hospital was required to send their staff to the cotton fields. All costs associated with transportation, accommodation, and alimentation for the cotton pickers, was thrust upon these enterprises and institutions.

At the same time, the country has been experiencing a considerable surplus of labour and every year, about 300,000 young people join the ranks of the working-age population. But these young people, who are often unable to find employment, do not want to work for a pittance, preferring to leave the country to Russia or Kazakhstan in search of work that pays a decent wage. In fact, many families are hired by farmers

9

10

9 Cotton headquarters. Cotton workers waiting for orders where to go pick cotton.
10 Cooking station for cotton workers.

The director said that the cotton harvest is not his own issue — but an issue of the Motherland. Cotton is the face of Uzbekistan and nobody has the right to refuse to pick cotton, if you live in Uzbekistan, and breath the air of Uzbekistan, drink Uzbekistan's water, and eat the bread of Uzbekistan.

Seventh grader, Jizzak province,
November 2011

Every evening, they let the children out into the street and those who fall behind, are "shamed" in front of the others. This has an adverse effect on the child's psyche. Sometimes they play rough with children's feelings. They say to girls: "Why are you so sick. You have no strength". Or they humiliate the boys: "What's with you, even a girl is better and stronger than you?!" It is very insulting. And the school director scolds them, and their mothers beat them.

Schoolteacher, Yangiyul district,
November 2011

in Kazakhstan to pick the very same cotton, as in Uzbekistan; and as those farmers are not burdened with administrative orders, they pay cotton pickers significantly more than Uzbekistan's bonded farmers.

Under such circumstances, the authorities in Uzbekistan heavily rely upon the labour of those who are dependent on the authorities and on state services — that includes students, schoolchildren and employees from sectors of the local economy and infrastructure.

At the same time, the government completely has not taken into account the fact that there's a price to be paid for forced labour — and that includes a lower quality of education and undermining of the local socio-economic sphere. And the forced labour of schoolchildren and students is not highly productive, especially in the last period of the harvest season, when little cotton remains in the fields. The farmers themselves note that it makes no sense to use such young children, ages 10 – 11, since they are not particularly productive and their work is not worth the time and money spent on it.

Children in the cotton fields

System of mobilisation

According to data from 2007, in Uzbekistan there were 3,106,000 students in grades five through nine.• These are the ages of the schoolchildren who are sent to pick cotton. From this number, if you take away those schoolchildren living in Tashkent city and some of the other larger cities, there are nearly two million children who are forced to work the fields. A more accurate estimate could only be produced by an independent monitoring mission from the ILO, which is the international body of expertise to assess and monitor the enforcement of international labour standards, such as the prohibition of forced labour and of child labour.

> **They do not sign labour contracts with the students or with their parents. The idea of putting a contract with parents on paper amazes all: "What's with you? Have you come from another planet? Have you ever seen anything like this? To have a written contract!? ... That parents have to ask permission of teachers whether they can keep their children at home."**
>
> Teacher, Zarbdor district,
> November 2011

The mobilization of schoolchildren and students to pick cotton is done without any kind of documentation — in order to circumvent any existing laws that prohibit it. No written instructions about sending children to work exist. At the start of the cotton picking season, within each district hokimiyat, a "headquarters" is set up, charged with the responsibility of fulfilling the cotton plan. The terms "headquarters" and "mobilization," are drawn from military vocabulary. Indeed, during the cotton campaign, a military hierarchy is set up in which there are generals, colonels, and lieutenants of sorts, with their own kind of "cannon fodder," as well.

The headquarters are made up of the staff of the hokimiyat, the head of the department of education, the prosecutor, the head of the district police, and the heads of various enterprises that have economic transactions with the farmers. The head of the district headquarters usually is the hokim of the district or his deputy.

In the beginning of September, the headquarters staff convenes a meeting at which the hokims and others issue orders (only verbal orders) to the heads of the Rayono (District Department of Education) to organize the mobilization of students and schoolchildren to pick cotton. The corresponding order from the Rayono, also only issued verbally, to directors of schools, in turn requires the teachers to send their students and schoolchildren to pick cotton. The following morning, the children gather at their schools in an organized manner, and, under the supervision of their teachers, are sent to work in the cotton fields, and to get to the fields either by foot or on a designated bus.

Based on the number of students, teachers, and technicians from the schools, the hokimiyat sets up a daily plan for the cotton harvest. Then, it sets a cotton plan for each student, depending on the student's age. The difference in the plans for different ages is about 10 kilograms: older students are usually required to bring in 50-60 kilograms of cotton, whereas younger students are required to bring in 10 kilograms less, etc.

The school director answers to the hokimiyat on the progress of the delivery of cotton. The cotton must be delivered regardless of whether the parents express their dissatisfaction with the process. Should the required amounts not be delivered, the school director can be subject to all kinds of punishment, or even face dismissal.

Labour conditions and payment

If a child becomes sick during the autumn cotton harvesting season, then his/her parents are responsible for the cost of his/her treatment. Throughout the cotton season, cotton pickers do not get a single day off. Schoolchildren are not allowed to be absent, unless they have a medical certificate of their illness. But to get these certificates is very difficult, as doctors have been instructed in advance to limit the number of such certificates issued.

If the cotton fields are located 5 – 10 kilometers away from a school, then the children are required to walk there themselves and work for seven to eight hours each day with a short break for lunch. The lack of clean drinking water is a major problem for young cotton pickers. Children bring their own lunch and several bottles of water with them, however on a hot day, the children report that the water is only enough for two to three hours.

• Education in Uzbekistan: Balance of Supply and Demand, Tashkent: UNDP, 2007-2008, p. 97

The pay rate for cotton pickers is set by the state. This is the lowest amount paid for the same kind of work anywhere else in the Central Asian region. From 2009 to 2011 the amount paid did not change significantly, ranging from 100 to 125 Uzbek soums (about 3 cents) per kilogram of cotton. For example, in a country with lower national income such as Tajikistan, a cotton picker can get 6 cents, and Kazakh farmers pay 10.9 cents per kilogram; this is respectively two to three times the amount paid in Uzbekistan.

Pay for schoolchildren is calculated at the same rate as adults. However, we need to bear in mind the difference in payment based on the grade of the cotton harvested and delivered. In the first period of the cotton picking season, cotton that is received at the cotton drop-off points and determined to be first-class quality is paid for at higher rates. During this period, the farmer tries to pick the cotton himself to "gather the cream." And every subsequent seven to ten days the quality of the cotton drops. Likewise, the pay rates go down as well.

Farmers try to delay the time when children are brought to work the fields as much as the district leadership allows. Children are left to work in the second half of the cotton season when the cotton crop is smaller, when the pay is lower, and the weather conditions get worse — it starts to rain, it gets cold.

Not all children receive the same amount of money. In interviews, children talked about how a big part of the money that they earned was passed on to the "school fund" to pay for subscriptions to newspapers and journals, for repairs to the school, and to purchase school supplies. Parents reported that children did not even earn enough money to buy new clothes and shoes to replace those that they wore out from working through the cotton season.

Does the money that children earn from picking cotton in the fields make a difference in family budgets? Not really. The average amount that an older student earns during the whole cotton season is little more than 20-25 USD. As a rule, the amount of money they take home is so small that it can only cover the cost for food they eat while picking cotton, and that is only the case if the farmers organize meals for them.

This system of payment for labour, of course, is of no benefit to adults. So they avoid the labour. Only those who can be forced by administrative methods actually go to work the fields. In such circumstances, schoolchildren and students who can work in the fields all day, despite the lack of economic benefits, are considered by the authorities as the optimal labour force to pick cotton — to the very last box, as required by the state.

> You don't send the children
> to pick cotton?
> Enemy of the People!

With regards to schoolchildren and students who are not strong enough to pick cotton, they are subjected to various kinds of punishment. Unable to deliver on the school's cotton quotas, they are humiliated before their entire class. This is particularly the case with boys — they get called names and are made fun of for physical shortcomings, such as lack of strength. Often, children talk about how they are publicly humiliated by their teachers, as well as threatened with getting lower marks in school, or not receiving their diploma or certificate upon graduation from school.

> **Our college is located in the village «Gulbahor», on Sharaf Rashidov Street. We were taken to the fields in a different sector (village), and were set up in a school. In the fields, we were put on a cargo truck and then told to walk. It was too dangerous on the truck. They had four teachers supervising our group. All of the teachers were men who were sweating and getting angry. We have one physical education teacher, and if you sit down for even a single minute, just to take a break, and he catches you, he takes note of it. If the fields are far away, then they wake us up at 5 in the morning. At this time we wash up, eat breakfast, and then head to the fields, where we are by 7–7:30. We work until 17:30 in the evening, a total of 10 hours.**
>
> Junior college student,
> 15 years old, Tashkent province,
> November 2011

According to parents, students' refusal to go to work the fields, affects their relationship with their teachers. These students are deliberately given lower marks in their classes. As a result, parents try to avoid conflict with the school administration.

It is much worse for students from lyceums, colleges, and universities. If a student seeks time off for the weekend or to be excused from fulfilling their cotton quota, then he/she must be ready to face serious punishment. They could be kicked out of their school or institute, or they could be denied their diploma upon completion of study.

O'ZBEKISTON RESPUBLIKASI

TOSHKENT VILOYATI

HOKIMI

РЕСПУБЛИКА УЗБЕКИСТАН

ХОКИМ

ТАШКЕНТСКОЙ ОБЛАСТИ

FARMOYISH

РАСПОРЯЖЕНИЕ

2011 yil «23» Iyul 133-f -son

Об утверждении временного порядка оплаты за оказанные транспортные услуги по перевозкам хлопкоробов и их вещей на постоянный сбор хлопка «Урожая 2011 г.»

1. Согласится с предложенным ассоциацией «Ташвилтранстерминал» порядком распределения затрат за оказанные транспортные услуги в разрезе фермерских хозяйств, при вывозе хлопкоробов и их вещей на постоянный сбор хлопка-сырца «Урожая 2011 г.» согласно приложению №1.

2. Хокимам районов, в установленном порядке, обеспечить оформление документов на оплату за оказанные транспортные услуги, согласно приложению №2.

3. В соответствии с пунктом 5 постановления Кабинета Министров Республики Узбекистан «О мерах по совершенствованию договорных отношений и повышению ответственности сторон за выполнение обязательств в сельскохозяйственном производстве» от 4 сентября 2003 года №383, рекомендовать хлопзаводам ассоциации «Ташхлопкопром» заключить договора с перевозчиками ассоциации «Ташвилтранстерминал» на оказание автотранспортных услуг и обеспечить своевременную оплату, с последующим удержанием средств у фермерских хозяйств.

4. Контроль за исполнением настоящего распоряжения возложить на первого заместителя хокима области Ибрагимова Б. и заместителя хокима Абдуллаева С.

Хоким области UMUMIY BO'LIM **Холматов Р.**

Приложение №1
к распоряжению хокима
Ташкентской области от
"23" июля 2011г № 133-ф

ПОРЯДОК

распределения затрат за оказанные транспортные услуги в разрезе фермерских хозяйств, при вывозе хлопкоробов и их вещей на постоянный сбор хлопка-сырца урожая 2011г.

1. При завозе хлопкоробов в поссовете (махалинском комитете, сельсовете и т.д.) уточняется наименование фермерских хозяйств, в которых они будут собирать хлопок.

2. В Ассоциации фермерских хозяйств, согласно списка фермеров, полученного в поссовете, уточняется площадь, засеянная хлопком каждым фермерским хозяйством.

3. В соответствии с нарядами, подписанными и заверенными печатями поссоветов, составляется реестр задолженности за оказанные транспортные услуги.

Исходя из вышеприведенных данных производятся следующие расчеты:

На сбор хлопка было вывезено 640 хлопкоробов. По данным ассоциации фермерских хозяйств, фермеры засеяли хлопком 400 га.

Расчетно, на каждый гектар, приходится 1,6 хлопкороба (640 чел. : 400 га)

Согласно нарядов и реестра, затраты на перевозки хлопкоробов составили 2 100 000 сум, т.е. в расчете на одного хлопкороба 3281,3 сум (2 100 000 сум : 640чел).

Согласно имеющихся данных, в фермерском хозяйстве «Ташмат» под хлопком занято 5 га. Исходя, из указанной площади, за ним расчетно закрепляется 8 чел (5 га *1,6 чел).

Исходя из расчетного количества хлопкоробов, затраты на транспортные расходы по фермерскому хозяйству «Ташмат» составят 26250 сум (8 чел*3281,3)

По аналогичной методике производятся расчеты и по другим фермерским хозяйствам.

Uzbek-German Forum For Human Rights

Parents, who do not want to send their children to the cotton fields, are convinced that cotton is a political issue and that failure to send their child to help the state, means that you are expressing opposition to state policy. However, parents of these schoolchildren are completely aware that the teachers themselves are in turn dependent on the state and are forced, under the threat of losing their jobs, to enforce the rules.

In other cases, parents were forced to let their children go to the cotton fields after they got threats from the makhalla committee or from the district policeman that they would lose their social welfare or that their electricity and gas services would be shut off.

Civil disobedience during the time of the cotton campaign is viewed by the authorities as sabotage and as an activity against the state and its policies. In order not to get a "dress down" from the hokim or the prosecutor, the school director demands that the quotas get fulfilled; he will resort to any measure, including physical violence to fulfill it. A video that a student shot on a mobile phone and was then posted onto YouTube in autumn 2011, caught the dean of the Faculty of Chemical Technology of Karakalpak State University beating a student. The dean first scolded the students who didn't meet their quotas and subsequently beat the rest of the group, one after the other.

To cotton, like to war — there are victims

It is not only the working conditions, but the way that children are brought to the cotton fields, that is hazardous to their health and life. Often, in order to save money, rather than using buses, tractor trailer trucks or carts designed to carry and transport raw cotton are used to transport the children to the fields.

In other cases, children go to and from work on foot along the highways, risking becoming victims of traffic accidents. Naturally, there are causalities. On September 24, 2011, upon returning from a cotton field, a 13 year old cotton picker, Bakhodir Pardaev, a student from the sixth grade in School 24 from the Chirakchin district in Kashkadarya, was in an accident. The boy was in a coma for 22 days. When he regained consciousness, he could not speak and stared out into space. When his case became known to human rights activists, the parents were then subject to pressures from the local authorities. The family was told that they should not "connect this case to cotton, since that would be political, but should say that this was just a regular unfortunate accident." On March 3, 2013, the Kashkadarya district court rejected a claim by the boy's parents to bring to justice those responsible for sending a schoolchild to pick cotton, noting that the incident was unrelated to the cotton campaign. At this time, Bakhodyr Pardaev, though out of the coma, has not fully recovered.

Lessons that are missed due to the cotton harvest, are then taught during the school break. In one lesson, we have to race through 2-3 topics… This affects the quality of education. It is not easy to learn three topics in a one-hour lesson. Students stuffer, they can't answer the questions…

Teacher, Shakhirzabs district, November 2011

Cotton — this is not a plant, it is politics, and if I persecute a teacher because of cotton, the state is on my side. Who can the poor teacher complain to?!

School director, Yangiyul, November 2011

Teachers in dual roles — victims and taskmasters

Children are not students, so the can't be expelled from their colleges or universities. They are not soldiers and can't be sent to the guardhouse as punishment. So, the authorities influence and control them through their parents. And the parents are basically forced to communicate with the teachers, who, if they are not able to convince parents to let their children go work in the fields, risk losing their jobs.

At the time of the cotton harvest, there are signs on the doors of all institutions that read "Everyone — picking cotton!" This inscription is above the law. Even if someone doesn't like cotton deep in their soul, anything they say aloud and within earshot about cotton is good. People, talking bad about cotton, are shunned by the others. It's as if they suppose those who criticize will be thrown in prison. If a manager calls upon employees to work, the employees may refuse. But you cannot say "no" when it comes to picking cotton. Usually, if you do not want to do something, then you apologize and come up with all kinds of excuses. Cotton — is an order of the state. To be against cotton is taken as though you are against the state.

Housewife, Khorezm, November, 2011

This way the teachers are taken hostage by the cotton campaign. They take on the main responsibility of organizing the children to go work in the fields. Teachers have to take care of the students during working hours. They also have to go to their students' homes and convince parents to let their children go to the fields in cases where parents resist sending their children to pick cotton. Teachers are personally held responsible for the health and the lives of the schoolchildren by the parents. At the same time, they are held responsible by the administration, for meeting the quotas set for the cotton harvest. As a result, teachers during the time of the cotton season turn into taskmasters over the schoolchildren, and become complicit in their exploitation.

Teachers admitted that resisting the existing order was a lost cause, since the instructions for the mobilization of children comes from the government in Tashkent. Those who have tried to protest face problems and could be dismissed from their work.

On November 22, 2011, the deputy director for education of School № 4 in the Olot district in Bukhara province, Gaibullo Bektashev was dismissed from his post. He says that it was because he refused to issue a statement, releasing his students from their studies from September 19 to October 17, demanding an official order for the release of children to go to the fields. His letters about the human rights of teachers and children to the Ministry of Education were regularly returned to the district department of education.

Although impossible to hide the massive scale of the exploitation of children, there is little direct evidence documenting the involvement of state officials. No hokims will sign written decrees ordering the mobilization of schoolchildren to the fields. All school registers are doctored to leave no trace or evidence of any disruptions to the educational process.

Nearly all of the teachers surveyed, expressed the opinion that these regular disruptions from studies, undoubtedly affected the quality of education. In order to try to catch up on the school curriculum, the number of lessons after returning from the cotton fields is increased, the fall and winter breaks are shortened, and schoolchildren nonetheless are unable to catch up with their studies.

Although secondary education in Uzbekistan is mandatory, because of the cotton campaign, class time in most schools is reduced one and a half to two times. The educational process is traditionally considered to be for eight months a year (including all school breaks). But the time schoolchildren spend out of the classroom gathering cotton can be up to three months a year. That means that their studies are not eight, but five months a year, which certainly has an impact on the overall level of education of Uzbek children.

Furthermore, many teachers are very aware of their task within the framework of the cotton campaign, and see it as important government work, which is "non-negotiable." The logic is simple: because the schools are financed from the state budget, and the budget depends on the export of cotton, the children have to participate in helping the state gather this precious crop. "I would certainly want to quietly continue classes, but ... we grew up this way ... and our children will grow up this way. Maybe in the future, the next generation will live differently ..." — says one teacher from Jizzak.

In an interview, the director of a school said that the authorities will forgive problems with the quality of studies, but not disobedience in the cotton campaign. During the cotton campaign, every day there are staff meetings held in the schools and in the field camps, in which they report on progress fulfilling the cotton quotas.

Following international pressure, Uzbekistan introduced new laws and ratified international conventions, prohibiting child labour. However, experience has shown that this was done exclusively to distract observers from the real state of affairs and to reassure the international community. Most of teachers and parents have no clear idea of the law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On guarantees of the rights of the child," adopted in 2008 and have not heard about Uzbekistan's ratification of the International Labour Organization's convention on forced child labour. This lack of understanding of, and interest in, the law is due to peoples' lack of expectations that these laws will actually be enforced to protect them. Everyone understands that the laws are only a smokescreen behind which there is a completely different reality, governed by unwritten laws, and above all, the ultimate law — "do as the chief orders, and do not argue." Thus, the adoption of new laws is seen as a formality by both government officials and ordinary people, and therefore they do not need to know them.

8 - sentabr.

Maqsadimiz - barkamol avlodni tarbiyalash!

O'ZBEKISTON RESPUBLIKASI PREZIDENTI

ҲАММА
ПАХТА
ЙИҒИМ-ТЕРИМИГА!
Туманимиз аҳолиси ва барча корхона ва ташкилот раҳбарлари диққатига!
Туманимизда етиштирилган оқ-олтин ҳосилини бир граммини ҳам нобуд қилмасдан йиғиб териб олайлик!

IBSIZ!
O'z.R. Q.R.
Ellikqal'a rayonliq
Xaliq bilimlendiriw mekeme
xizmetin metodikaliq ta'miyi
ha'm sho'lkemlestiriw bo'l
49 - uliwma bilim beriw
mektebi

11

12

11 Empty school
12 “Everyone to the cotton harvest.
Dear compatriots (countrymen), gather all the cotton crop grown in our fields without loss”

13

14

13 + 14 Accomodation set up for cotton harvesters

Where is the revenue
from the export of cotton?
Schools without heat

In 2011 Uzbekistan was hit by an energy crisis. The country faced a dramatic increase in electricity and gas outages, and everywhere there were long lines at gas stations. In the autumn, the crisis peaked. Power shortages, problems with supplies of natural gas, lack of heating in schools and at various enterprises in the winter — these issues were identified by respondents as some of the most critical problems faced by residents of Uzbekistan's provinces. The government never explained the reason for the energy shortages; rather, the government suggested that the population find solutions on their own, such as stocking up on coal and wood for the winter. And this in a country which previously had achieved near universal access to gas, and from which gas is exported to neighboring countries and to Russia.

In the winter, the school is not well heated. Already for the last two years, the younger students collect money and build a fire. Or every day, each student brings a package of firewood and coal to light the stoves in the classrooms. Back in the day, in my childhood, we had a caretaker at the school. He would set up the stoves before the children arrived for class. Now the caretakers do not set up the stoves. And young students are supposed to light up the stoves now? How are they supposed to do that?

Mother of a student, Andijan province, November 2011

At this time, we are cold at school. There is no gas, there is no electricity. And so, to make a normal heating network for gas, you need central heating, a boiler. You need pumps which bring water to the third floor. All of this requires electricity and gas. And we don't have any.

9th Grade Student, Zamin district, November 2011

However, as the teachers point out, "the school heating systems are built right", but they are not working due to the lack of electricity and gas. Schools are cold in the winter, and the administrations seek various schemes to heat them. Some of the money that students make from picking cotton goes to the purchase of plastic bags which are then used to cover the windows "I would like it if I could come to school and change my shoes, take off my heavy boots, but it's too cold in the classroom.", says one 12 year old boy from Khorezm province.

It is obvious that the money that supposedly is set aside to furnish schools is either minimal or simply does not end up at the schools. The collection of funds for the various needs of schoolchildren, such as heating, repairs, improvement of classrooms, holding various activities, has become part of the educational process and an unbearable burden for parents. This year, such collections became legal. The government issued a regulation on the establishment of parental Trusts.● It is likely that their true purpose is to raise funds for the school fund from parents and to control their spending.

Teachers and parents cite problems with the schools as including forced labour and the attendant missing of studies for long stretches of time, dilapidated buildings and classrooms, regular power shortages and the lack of gas supplies, poor heating, lack of computers and internet access, lack of textbooks, corruption and ongoing collections of money from the students.

Social injustice and lack of basic living conditions cause irritation and hidden protest. People began to understand that the problem does not come from the actions of the local leaders, but from the very top:

"The school is heated by gas. This year, there is no gas, no light, and gasoline — none. The state sells gas to China, Europe, and Russia, but there's none for its own people ... The children have no faith in justice, they see cheating at every step of the way, the books and the TV say one thing, but in life — they see something else entirely ..." (teacher, Yangiul, 2011).

● Decree of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan, No.185, 06/13/2012, http://norma.uz/publish/doc/text82439_ob_utverjdenii_tipovogo_polojeniya_o_popechitelskom_sovete_uchrejdeniya_narodnogo_obrazovaniya

Adults and students in the cotton fields

Adult forced labour

The forced mobilization of the adult population to the cotton fields has taken place throughout the post-Soviet period, continuing a practice that started in the Soviet era. Until recently, the mobilization of workers primarily included workers from social sector institutions and services in the provinces. It included teachers, medical personnel, employees of various industrial enterprises and other institutions. There were even reports that workers from the Uzbek-American joint venture for the production of passenger cars, General Motors Uzbekistan, were sent to work in the 2011 cotton season, apparently with the tacit consent of the company's management. ●

For the past two years, the scale of the mobilization of adults to pick cotton has increased significantly. This apparently is connected to the aspirations of the Government of Uzbekistan to shift the burden of forced labour from children onto adults, thus showing some "progress" towards reducing child labour. To make this shift, there has been an increase in repressive measures. If the mobilization of children is a relatively smooth and easy operation, it is much harder to force adults to leave their homes or their workplaces. For this, the authorities have to employ much more extreme punitive measures, such as the threat of dismissal from work. This works pretty well. Those who really don't want to go to pick cotton are then compelled to pay a bribe.

To grasp the magnitude of the mobilization of adults, it is enough just to do a basic estimate. As of April 1, 2012, there were 527,800 organizations and enterprises in the country that had status as legal entities. Taking into account that very few organizations are able to get around compulsory orders, and given that each one can send between four and five individuals (that is the assumed minimum), it adds up such that the number of people mobilized from among the adult population is nearly two million. This rough calculation is supported by a document issued on 23 July 2011 by the Tashkent regional hokimiyat (see below) and signed by the hokim, R. Holmatov, which gives instructions to farmers on how many cotton pickers they should expect and to public transportation agencies on how many buses they should allocate. The document estimates the number of people required per hectare in the cotton fields, which is 1.5 people/hectare. According to the State Committee of Statistics of Uzbekistan, 1.307 million hectares of cotton were planted in 2012; this would require 2,091,200 cotton pickers, according to the calculation requiring 1.5 persons/hectare.

The absence of so many people from the cities is obvious and noticeable: during the cotton campaigns, the bazaars are empty, the stores and bazaar stands are closed, public transport continues to operate, but with noticeable disruptions, and in hospitals and clinics there is a dire shortage of medical personnel to care for patients.

It is very clear that there is no real progress in the situation. Quite the opposite — the country is increasingly beginning to resemble a large Stalin-era labour camp. An indication of this is the number of police officers, National Security Service officers, and riot police that are engaged in escorting citizens to the cotton fields.

Mahallas as the driving force in the mobilization of adults

Mahalla committees, neighborhood community self-governing bodies, which are the lowest administrative-territorial units in Uzbekistan, are also ordered by hokimiyats to mobilize adults to pick cotton, mostly in rural areas and small towns. Although the government may describe the participation of mahalla residents as voluntary, these residents are under significant pressure to participate and there are many reports of mahalla members losing their social benefits as punishment for not picking cotton. The mahallas are responsible for

● http://www.fergananews.com/article.php?id=7099 (retrieved on 09/11/2012)

distributing government welfare benefits to low-income citizens, and there are many reports of mahallas denying social benefits to low-income citizens who refuse to pick cotton. There is no written documentation of such punishments, and the mahallas involved always provide excuses for denying the benefits that conceal the linkage with the refusal to pick cotton.

At the orders of the hokimiyats, chairs of mahalla committees recruit "volunteers" from their communities to pick cotton every harvest, and organize transportation and coordinate with the regional hokims to send the workers to the farms.

Mahalla members who participate are typically low-income citizens seeking additional income, usually women, as a substantial number of men are leaving to find better paid jobs in Russia and Kazakhstan. In the Fergana Valley, activists reported that the mahallas make up the majority of pickers during the first stage of the harvest, when the cotton is plentiful. During the second stage ("2nd pick"), fewer mahalla members volunteer to pick the cotton, because there is less cotton and therefore a lower possibility of earning additional income. At this stage, the government mobilizes more urban residents who can be unpaid at all, as they keep receiving their salaries from their main employment. In this manner, non-agricultural organizations and enterprises subsidize the cotton industry.

Now the residents of the capital are cotton slaves

Throughout the post-Soviet period, the authorities refrained from mobilizing Tashkent residents for the cotton harvest, placing the burden of forced cotton collection on the residents of the provinces. But 2011 was a turning point.

In the beginning of September, verbal instructions were given to schoolteachers from schools and kindergartens, as well as students from several Tashkent-based educational institutions. A little later, on September 18, most organizations and enterprises in the capital, including privately owned ones, were given instructions "from above" to send their employees to the cotton fields.

"At the end of last week, my wife, who works in a nursery school, was informed by her director that she was to go to pick cotton. But she decided that she would be better off if she resigned from her job", — one Tashkent resident named Erkin said. He said that he was more concerned about his wife's health, as she is prone to getting colds, is the mother of two children and has no business going out to work in the fields for no good reason.

The employees of a large engineering factory in the capital (which requested that the name of the factory be withheld), received instructions from the administration of the factory that they were to pick cotton on September 19, 2011: "the director said that this is an order from the hokim of Mirzo-Ulugbek district". They said that the company's management put together a list of 50 people. And they were brought to the province to pick cotton. According to a nurse named Saodat, the Ministry of Health received orders to send one thousand medical personnel to the cotton fields from each district of Tashkent city.

Many state agencies send their employees to the cotton fields on the orders of the respective ministries. Thus, according to one doctor named Nargis, who works at the Institute of Obstetrics and Gynecology, 50 people from her institute were sent to pick cotton in Jizzak. She also confirmed, that the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Uzbekistan issued the order to send one thousand health care workers from each district to work in the fields for a 10 day period.

"A distribution list came to our mahalla to send 20 people to pick cotton — in all of my 70 years, I have never seen such idiocy", — said Niyaz aka — the chairman of one of Tashkent's neighborhood committees. According to him, the mahalla committee is comprised of only two people, and to ask the residents of the mahalla is pointless, as they are sent to pick cotton from their workplaces or have already taken part in the business of "cotton extortion," that is paying bribes to get excused from picking cotton. Managers of companies and organizations

Rector of Jizzak State Pedagogical Institute named after A. Kodiri, Professor. O. Dusmatov, Dean of the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Docent A.T. Nurmanov from _____ student _____ course, _____ group.

RELEASE

I, _____
(Last name, First name, Patronymic),
upon admission to the Institute, was informed by the dean of the faculty, docent Nurmanov A.T. of the obligations, responsibilities, and rights of students of the Institute. In addition, I have read the decree of the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Education dated 29 March 1999 No 99 "On the improvement of the educational and labor discipline in higher education institutions".

I am aware that missing 30 hours or more without a valid reason is equivalent to severing ties with the institute. If I have an illness over an extended period of time (or become a mother), then on the basis of a certificate issued by the MSC [Medical-Supervisory Commission] by the appropriate medical facilities, I will be required to take a leave of absence. For short-term illness (5-10 days), I will be required to inform the head of the group within three days, and once I have recovered, provide, in a timely manner, to the dean, a medical certificate documenting the days I was ill, and then I shall be able to resume my studies.

If the staff of the institute and the students will be involved in the cotton harvest, I will participate with a group of the faculty. In the case of illness [which will not allow me to pick cotton] I will request a leave of absence.

If I fail to fulfill the abovementioned duties and responsibilities, I agree to any punishment administered by the Rector and Dean's office (including my own dismissal from studies).

_____ _____ «_____» _____ 200 _____ year
(last name, first name) (signature) (date)

А. Қодирий номли Жиззах Давлат педагогика институти ректори проф. О.Дўсматовга, Хорижий тиллар факультети декани доц. А.Т. Нурмановга шу факультет ____курс _____ гуруҳ талабаси _____ томонидан

Тилхат

Мен, _____
(фамилияси, исми ва шарифи)
факультетимиз декани доц.Нурманов А.Т. томонидан институтга ўқишга киришимдан институт талабасининг бурч, вазифалари ва ҳуқуқлари билан таништирилдим.Ундан ташқари ЎзР ОЎМТ вазирлигининг №99 сонли 29 март 1999 йилги "Олий ўқув юртларида ўқув ва меҳнат интизомини мустаҳкамлаш тўғрисидаги " буйруғи билан танишганман.

Сабабсиз 30 соат қолдирилиши институт билан алоқани узганлиги билан тенг эканлигини биламан. Касал бўлиб қолганимда (ёки фарзандли бўлиб қолганимда) тегишли табобат муассасалари томонидан берилган маълумотнома , ВКК лар асосида академик таътил оламан. Вақтинча (5-10 кун) касал бўлиб қолсам, бу ҳақида гуруҳ раҳбаримга 3 кун муддатда хабар бераман ва соғлиғимни тиклаб, касал бўлган кунларга оид медицина маълумотномасини деканатга ўз вақтида тақдим этиб, ўқишни давом эттираман.

Агар институт жамоаси ва талабалар пахта йиғим –теримига жалб этилса мен факультет жамоаси билан бирга бўламан. Соғлиғим билан боғлиқ сабаблар бўлса академик таътил сўрайман.

Юқорида айтилган бурч ва вазифаларни бажармайдиган бўлсам, ректорат ва деканат томонидан бериладиган жазога (ҳатто талабалар сафидан чиқарилишимгача) розиман.

_____ _____ "_____" _____200_____йил.
(фамилияси ва исми) (имзо) (сана)

collect money from their employees to pay mardikors (day labourers) to take their place in the cotton fields, so that they can do their part in the cotton campaign.

At the end of September, approximately 50 teachers from Tashkent's Uspensky music school, a world renowned music school known for its talented graduates, many of whom grace the concert halls of the U.S., Canada, and Europe, were sent to pick cotton in Jizzak. The authorities didn't even spare the leading professional musicians.

According to our data, the distribution list to send people to pick cotton was sent to the Tashkent Tractor factory, as well as companies in cities such as Chirchik, Angren, Toitepa, and the brewery in Kibray.

The government is forcing doctors to go to the cotton fields. For example, at the orders of the Ministry of Health, on September 20, 2011 all 10 family doctors from Polyclinic No. 13 in Tashkent city went to pick cotton for 10 days. As a result, their patients were left without care. A similar pattern was observed in other health care centers.

In 2011, students from institutes of higher education in the capital were not sent to pick cotton. The only exception was the Institute of Agriculture and Irrigation. However, a group of administrative workers and instructors from some institutes was sent to the fields. As a result, those teachers not sent to pick cotton, had to take on the workloads of those sent out. According to fresh reports, in the 2012 cotton season, the students of Tashkent's institutes were not spared, save for those from the most elite institutions, for example from the University of World Economics and Diplomacy. This indicates the increase in the scale of forced labour of the adult population.

It's only a "student practice"

As always, the first who are sent to the cotton fields are students from higher education institutions and junior colleges. According to figures from the UNDP, in 2008, in Uzbekistan, 1,385,000 students were studying in specialized professional educational institutions (lyceums and junior colleges), and 286,000 students were studying in higher education institutions.● As for students studying in junior colleges and lyceums, according to our observations, all of them, without exception, were sent to work in the fields. We have estimated the number of cotton pickers in this category to be approximately 1.2 million. At the same time, not all students from higher educational institutions take part in the cotton harvest. Only until recently, by 2011, the authorities did not take students from higher education institutions in the capital. Starting in 2011, university students from Tashkent were subject to compulsory labour in the cotton fields too. A safe estimate of cotton pickers in this category is about 200,000 students. Thus, the total number of all categories of students (with the exception of schoolchildren) mobilized in 2011, was no less than 1.4 million.

In 2011, the cotton campaign for all students of lyceums, junior colleges, and institutes of higher education began on September 6. But the students from Surkhandarya, Kashkadarya, Bukhara, and Ferghana provinces were sent as early as September 2.Tens of thousands of students who had just passed their entrance examinations but had not actually even begun their studies were sent to the fields. According to a report from Radio Ozodlik, a source at Bukhara State University said that on September 19, 2009, the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Education issued order 204-324, which states that "work by students in the cotton fields needed for professional development".●● In practice, this means that students who refuse to pick cotton can be expelled from the university due to their failure to participate in this "practical training." Referring to this order from the Ministry, on October 7, 2011, 12 students from Andijan Medical Institute, A. Isayev, D. Mirzayev, A. Khakimov, A. Khoshimov, G. Khaidariov, I. Ledyaeva, D. Barotov, Z. Sultonov, L. Isayev, U Kuchkarov, Dj. Kamolov, and B. Isomiddinov were expelled from the institute for having refused that September to pick cotton.●●●

It remains unclear how the cotton harvest can be considered an activity that promotes

● Education in Uzbekistan: Balance of supply and demand, Tashkent: UNDP, 2007-2008, стр. 109, 126.

●● Radio Ozodlik, 10/19/2009, http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/1855549.html (retrieved on 09/19/2012)

●●● Radio Ozodlik, 05/01/2012, http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/24566301.html (retrieved on 09/19/2012)

Working with cotton is not easy. If the sale of cotton were in our hands, then farmers would be the richest people here. But the way things are now, cotton has more costs attached to it than profit. If I had the choice, I would plant a garden, grow apples and pomegranates and sell them in Russia. Growing fruits and vegetables is better and more profitable.

Farmer, Andijan province,
November 2011

professional development, for example, for a student from the math department, or from any other specialty. But most importantly, the order of the Ministry of Education exposes the role it plays in the forced mobilization of students to pick cotton.

In addition, the heads of higher education institutions use other subtle forms of coercion, forcing students to sign a release that provides for his/her acceptance of such conditions such as expulsion in the case of his/her failure to participate in the cotton harvest. In these cases, failure to participate in the cotton harvest is regarded as absenteeism and will lead to the expulsion of the student from the institution. To this end, the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Education's dispensation of March 29, 1999 No 99 "On the improvement of the educational and labour discipline in higher education institutions" is at their disposal and used as the legal basis for such actions.

We present such a release form (in Uzbek and Russian languages), which students of the Jizzak Pedagogical Institute were forced to sign before they were sent to pick cotton. This document and its content contradict the laws and Constitution of Uzbekistan and expose the role of the central government in the systematic forced labour. The documents of the Ministry of Higher Education, as well as of its institutions accountable to it, provide clear evidence of the role it plays.

Life in the field encampments — "This is not a life!"

Unlike schoolchildren, students live in field camps for up to two months every year. As a rule, these are either barracks or local village schools or barns that are not intended for residence. The conditions in these field camps are often harsh, especially in terms of the quality of the food, the availability of clean water and basic standards of hygiene.

During the 2011 cotton campaign, students wrote about the harsh conditions they faced in online chat rooms, forums, and on social networks, they wrote songs, and they appealed to journalists. On September 12, students from the department of pediatrics of the Andijan Medical Institute sent an email to Radio Ozodlik recalling the conditions that they lived in, in the field camps, and appealing for help to free them from the tyranny of their teachers: "They behave like fascists with us. Every day, we are sent out to the fields at 4am and forced to collect 100 kilograms of cotton. There is no decent drinking water here. We go to bed at 12 at night. But they (the teachers) can rouse us in the middle of the night to start an assembly at which they announce the results of how well we have fulfilled the cotton plan. Husan Ganievich is particularly zealous in this respect, as he humiliates the students in public. We need help".•

Although there are no documented cases of mass resistance by students, there have been some cases of small scale resistance, although none have ended well for the students. For example on September 19, 2011 students from the 32nd group from Junior College No 7 from Chirchik city, who were taken to the Yukori Chirchik district of Tashkent province, announced a strike and refused to pick cotton in protest of what they said was unacceptable treatment by the College management and the terrible conditions that they were living under. Several girls left the field camp on their own, fleeing back to their homes. However, the protest did not yield any significant results. After some persuasion and threats, the students were forced to return to work.••

• Radio Ozodlik, 12.09.2011, http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/24326204.html (retrieved on 09/19/2012)

•• Source: Human Rights Alliance of Uzbekistan, September 2011.

Corruption during the cotton campaign

The cotton campaign and the participation of schoolchildren and students further enhance the already pervasive corruption endemic to Uzbekistan's educational system. Those who do not wish to participate in the "voluntary-compulsory" cotton harvest can pay their way out or send someone else in their place, for a fee — that is, giving a bribe or hiring a mardikor (a day labourer). According to many accounts, the approximate size of a bribe to be excused from picking cotton in 2011 was between 200,000 – 300,000 Sums (100 – 125 USD). This corresponds approximately to the average monthly salary in the country. For about the same amount of money, schoolchildren and students can buy a medical excuse as an exemption from picking cotton. At the same time, students and schoolchildren who were really sick, talked about the difficulties of obtaining a medical release certificate from a doctor, as they also demanded some form of payment.

According to the doctor surveyed in our 2011 interviews, the Buka city hospital in Tashkent province was filled with patients with colds, allergies and appendicitis (especially among the student population). However, among some categories of patients, for example, patients with allergies the doctors simple refused to give them exemptions, citing the risk of them losing their jobs. Doctors were instructed to significantly limit the number of medical exemptions that they could give out.

"In the beginning of September, I was made an offer to pay 300,000 soums instead of going out to pick cotton. But I couldn't pay because of the money — we really did not have enough money", — said 53 year old Dilfuza, a schoolteacher in the Nazarbek village which is outside of Tashkent. She had to go to pick cotton in the outskirts of the Akkuran city of Urtachirik district of Tashkent province. The working and living conditions were so bad that she chose to head back home the following week and borrow 300,000 soums from her wealthy neighbors to buy out her "labour obligation". This money went towards the monthly payment of a mardikor, an unemployed local man, to fulfill the cotton plan.

As it turns out, the local residents of the village who, unlike the city residents, have the skills to pick cotton, and participate in the cotton harvest, are hired not by the farmers, but by municipal organizations and enterprises, who cannot cope with the demands of the plan. The source of the payment for these local residents is not the farmers, nor the state, which pays farmers for the production of the cotton, but the citizens who are paying mardikors from their own pocket. The state further squeezes the population, first of all, saving on the purchase price for cotton, and second, making the urban populations pay mardikors to labour in the field. This kind of sophisticated exploitation of the population was not observed during Soviet times.

In addition to bribes or "taxes", to get oneself exempted from cotton labour, one can also take advantage of connections and proximity to the authorities. The children and the close relations of hokims and other big bosses get first dibs on exemptions for free — "through connections". For the rest, they need to turn out their pockets or just cope with the fact that they will have to allow their children to be sent to the cotton fields.

Farmers — also victims of coercion

Cotton — forced cultivation

Uzbekistan's agricultural sector, de jure, has been transferred from the system of collective and state farms to a system of private farmers and small farming enterprises. Farms have the status of legal entities and they are engaged in cotton cultivation. According to data from 2010, the country had 80,628 farming enterprises, each containing an average of 62.4 hectares of land.●

The main products of Uzbekistan's agricultural sector are grain and cotton. From all of the country's land under cultivation, which consisted in 2011 of 3,583,900 hectares, these two industries accounted for 1,605,000 hectares and 1,307,700 hectares.●● Both industries are still dominated by the administrative command system of management. This is put into practice, first and foremost, through a system of so-called compulsory public procurements and quotas, which are, in fact, the direct legacy of the Soviet era system of planning and directives. The plan for production and delivery of cotton, is handled by the association "Uzkhloprom", which sets the parameters for state procurements and contractual prices for the entire country, which are carried down to the state and regional authorities. The hokims of the provinces and districts are personally held responsible for the fulfillment of the state tasks.

The plans (or quotas) for the amounts of cotton they must deliver to the state are compulsory for farmers. These quotas are fixed in the annual contracts and contracting arrangements set with the farmers. Farmers have absolutely no right to say no to these contracts — or else they would have their land seized. Farmers themselves are victims of the system; cotton brings dividends to very few in the country.

In accordance with the laws of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On farming enterprises" dated April 20, 1998 (Article 11)●●● and "On small farming enterprises" dated April 30, 1998 (Article 1),●●●● the plot of land allocated to an individual farmer is intended for use during the lifetime of the farmer, and for farming enterprises — lands are given on a competitive basis for a period of between 30 and 50 years. In fact the competitive selection of effective farmers does not really happen. Almost everywhere, mercenary officials of the local administration take the good fertile land that has the best access to irrigation infrastructure and give it to their relatives, to the "necessary" people, and to those who hand over the requisite bribes. Thus, the villages have formed two classes of farmers: on the one hand, there are those who are close to the district and regional leadership and have the fat of the land, and on the other, ordinary farmers who receive second-rate land that does not have enough water or access to it, and who bear the burden of the requirement to deliver quotas.

Those who manage the land, hokims and those close to them, can take back the land on any excuse. For example, an ordinary farmer can regularly meet his targets and deliver the agricultural product, but can lose his land if he fails to deliver the agreed amount of cotton or grain even once.

In Article 16 of the Law "On farming enterprises" it says that farming enterprises are entitled to "dispose of their products, including the right to sell them to consumers at their own discretion", "to set the price of the products that they produce", and in Article 22, it states that "interference in the economic activities of farming enterprises on the part of state or other structures and organizations, as well as their officials is not allowed".●●●●● But these rights exist solely on paper. They are violated as a common practice through the administrative command system, while other articles of the same law contradict these rights. Thus the law requires farmers to use their land and production in accordance with their contracts with the state, the terms of which are dictated by the latter, without showing any regard for the preferences and interests of farmers.

Some farmers are not sufficiently versed in the law, often not understanding the language of the contracts that they sign with the state representative body (Uzkhloprom), thus becoming vulnerable to being misled. Taking

● Source: http://podrobno.uz/cat/economic/number/ (retrieved on 09/11/2012)

●● Source: http://www.12.uz/ru/news/show/economy/10976/ (retrieved on 09/11/2012)

●●● Published in the 2004 edition.: http://www.lex.uz/Pages/GetAct.aspx?lact_id=275191 (retrieved on 09/19/2012)

●●●● http://www.lex.uz/Pages/GetAct.aspx?lact_id=6634 (retrieved on 19.09.2012).

●●●●● http://www.lex.uz/Pages/GetAct.aspx?lact_id=275191 (retrieved on 19.09.2012)

advantage of this state of affairs, an unscrupulous official, in his duties, often suggests that the farmer sign a blank page of the contract. Others are intelligent and know what is going on, but they have no power to change it. That is why so many leave farming and migrate to Russia or Kazakhstan. They do not own the land and cannot negotiate the price of cotton sold. Meanwhile, officials' relatives and farmers close to him only have the minimum in terms of obligations of what they must deliver, and therefore have a reduced cotton plan. Those who challenge the terms offered to them may remain without land and/or work.

The prices at which farmers must sell their cotton are dictated from above and often do not cover all of the expenses of the farmer. For this reason, cotton farms are unable to accumulate enough capital to buy new tools and equipment that might help them expand their production, or pay decent wages to cotton pickers. In 2011 the state set the purchasing price for cotton at an average of. 35 USD for one kilogram. According to the farmers, "if the purchasing price for cotton even reached as much as. 5USD, they would be able to grow the cotton crop without any loss to themselves". The unfair terms of the contracts imposed by the state has forced farmers to become indebted to the banks from which they get credits and thus become completely dependent on the local authorities.

The issue, however, is not only that the purchasing price of the cotton is artificially low, but that the farmer has imposed upon him monopolistically high prices for supplies, especially for services from the tractor-transport services. The farmer, with his low income is unable to purchase a tractor and cotton harvester and must lease them. Farmers are also burdened with costs that are not related to production. At the request of the authorities, they are required to provide funding and manpower to clear the highway — so that the President can travel on it, repair and improve schools, hospitals, sports and other social facilities. In addition, frequent inspections force farmers to spend money on entertaining uninvited "guests", and sometimes for bribes.

One of the farmers surveyed in 2010 reported the following balance of costs and revenues for the 2009 harvest season, based on one hectare of cotton. Per hectare, revenues totaled an average 1.506 million soums (or $800), while expenses amounted to 1.925 million soums ($1,000), so that the farmer's losses totaled 419,000 soums per hectare planted in cotton. This is typical for most farmers.

Since cotton is unprofitable for many farmers, the farmers interviewed recognized that they cover the cost of the expenses related to cotton with the revenue from other agriculture products that they legally do not have the rights to grow. The vast majority of the farmers surveyed agree with the opinion that: "The priority for us farmers, is to fulfill the plan at any cost and pay off part of the debt to the bank and to the various enterprises — suppliers; making a profit is the least priority." In reality, many farmers cannot count on profits, which are barely possible under the current pricing system; they are simply trying to make ends meet.

But there is a small category of farmers with relatively low cotton quotas, with better quality land and access to water. They are usually those connected to the local authorities. In addition, they have the opportunity to take a large chunk of land for more profitable crops. But the vast majority of farmers end their fiscal years in debt, finding themselves getting poorer every year, continuing to drive themselves into debt, and not seeing a way out of their situation, to say nothing about investing in machinery or modern agro-technologies.

Farming enterprises — de jure are independent private enterprises but de facto are denied the right to decide at their own discretion what crops to grow and on what fields. Farmers can even end up in prison for the unauthorized usage of their land for personal use or to grow more profitable crops.

In their execution of orders coming from the top, the local authorities have established strict supervision over the activities of farmers. They are obliged to regularly submit to the district authorities a detailed report about all agricultural activities that shows the schedule in which they are done, including the plowing

of the land, planting of seeds, weeding, cultivation, vegetative irrigation, minting, defoliation, application of fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides, etc.. Often, a farmer attempting to reduce the cost of cotton production by optimizing the agricultural-technical services to the fields can be called "on the carpet" and get a full scale dressing-down because these activities are really beyond the limits of what is found to be acceptable for reporting. He is supposed to perform "for the team" and not take entrepreneurial initiative.

In addition to performing "for the team," the farmers spend a considerable amount of time filling out paperwork, various reports, and standard forms of complex statistical reports, which binds them hand and foot. For example, without the knowledge and consent of the local administration, it is prohibited to sell cattle and use the proceeds to purchase spare parts for tractors and other equipment or to use them for personal family needs. They cannot re-seed land that is free of grain crops to get a second harvest, etc. Farmers' requests are frequently denied, and if they disobey the authorities, they will have to deal with the prosecutor's office.

The association "Uzkhloprom", which has the status and authority of a ministry, holds the monopoly on the purchase and processing of raw cotton. Its cotton treatment enterprises have an interest in understating the quality and sort of the cotton it receives from the farmers, and then exaggerating its grade and sort when it is given to the state. In addition, the collectors deduct from the cotton, the amount accounting for moisture. As a result, due to the increase in moisture and the decrease in the grade of the cotton, they are able to prey upon the farmers. This difference is not recorded in public records. The money swindled from farmers is either profit for the cotton dealers or is used to bribe other parts of the bureaucracy, such as auditors.

In accordance with the standard contract for the delivery of cotton that is made with farmers, the state procurement agency and processing plants are required to pay 80% of the cost of the goods delivered within seven days after their delivery. The remaining 20% is to be paid by September of the following year, when, due to high inflation, it will be devalued at least by 10-20%. But here is what one farmer had to say about the matter: "Other agricultural products sold in our markets are mostly sold at market prices for 'real live' money. Often you get paid for grain immediately upon the delivery to the procurement enterprises. But for cotton, to get cash, it's difficult" (farmer, Yangiyul).

There are serious issues related to the payment for the delivered product. Payments are made to the farmer's corporate bank account. But in Uzbekistan's economy, there is a big difference in value between money deposited into a corporate account and cash. It is difficult for enterprises, especially for farmers, to withdraw cash from their corporate accounts, and often the banks do not allow them to withdraw cash until the farmers' obligations to the suppliers are met. Very rarely payments via inter-bank transactions (beznalichnyi raschot) are used in the market of services and goods, so that farmers often find themselves in situations in which they have funds deposited to their corporate bank accounts, but cannot use them to pay for services and commodities needed for daily operations.

In addition, farmers are unable, sometimes for months, even years, to access money owed to them, and thus become, through no fault of their own, indebted to the banks. Because of this, farmers are forced to default on their scheduled repayment of loans and debts, tax payments, payments to non-budget funds, and payment of penalties and fines.

Arbitrary power

The way out of this situation for many farmers is to rent out their land and find work in other countries, mostly in Russia and Kazakhstan. Indeed there has been a widespread desire by farmers to abandon the land they were allocated and thus be freed of the burden of the state apparatus. But it is equally impossible for them, as the district and provincial authorities, fearing the consequences of farmers abandoning

PAYNET

15

16

15 People waiting for the market to open
16 Pedagogical College, Karakalpakstan

their land, threaten the "refuseniks" with criminal prosecution and seizure of their personal property, including their homes, which can be confiscated for debts that farmers may owe to suppliers, creditors, and the state. In fact, the situation of farmers is very similar to the lives of Russian serfs in the 19th century, who were not allowed to leave their land.

A farmer who was present at a public district meeting with the hokim described it in his words when addressing the indebted farmers: "Each of you is up to the neck with a minimum 50 million soums payable to the suppliers. On the day we receive your letter [to liquidate the farming enterprise], the courts will issue a sanction and you will be arrested so that you cannot run away. And if you still try to run away, the bailiff will come to your home and seize everything that you have in your house. If this is not enough, we will cast your family out into the street and sell your house to the highest bidder." (Interview with a farmer, Jizzak province, 2011.)

The head of the cotton campaign for the entire country is the Prime Minister, Shavkat Mirziyoev, who is known for his temper. His verbal orders are executed implicitly, as local leaders understand that their future career depends on their successful implementation of the cotton plan. Farmers from Jizzak remembered that when Mirziyoev was hokim of their region, he often allowed himself to publicly dress down and beat farmers.

We have come into possession of a copy of a government telegram sent out to the provinces with Mirziyaev's signature (see the full text in the appendix). The tone of the telegram is threatening and the threats are addressed to farms that did not fulfill their part of the state cotton plan. The telegram calls for tough measures for those who have not fulfilled their plans, such as: "to cancel the lease on their land" and submit a claim to the courts for the "unconditional damage done to every farming enterprise by the inability to pay back funds borrowed for paying for equipment". Moreover, the "leaders of the local departments of the prosecutor's office and judicial bodies are personally responsible for the organization and implementation of the above mentioned measures".

This commanding and threatening style of management has spread throughout the country and is played out at the local level by local hokims who behave like despots with little respect for the farmers. During the cotton season, hokims in all of the provinces hold meetings at which farmers report on their progress fulfilling their part of the cotton harvest. Farmers who are not meeting their obligations to the plan endure public scoldings and even beatings. Taking advantage of the marginalized situation of the farmers, the hokims systematically bully those who are unable to keep up.

Hokims lead the farmers in the same way that khans led their subordinates. They can call any farmer "on the carpet" regardless of the time or the distance from his/her farm to the hokimiyat. The hokim, akin to the khans of the past, is only lacking a personal executioner; instead, that function is assigned to the law enforcement agencies. Their participation in the cotton campaign is routine in nature and serves primarily to provide oversight and exercise repression. And this function is sanctioned by the president himself.

In accordance with the Decree of the President dated March 11, 2004 "On additional measures to ensure the implementation of legislation to reform the agricultural sector", special sub-departments in the prosecutor's office and other law enforcement bodies "must exercise control over the use of arable land, materials and equipment received through loans, to fulfill the contractual obligations of business entities, financial discipline, and orders by local authorities for the production and delivery of cotton and other crops to the state entities".●

Some farmers are unable to cope with blackmail, pressure and constant humiliation from the authorities and law enforcement agencies and simply commit suicide. At the height of the fall season on September 12, 2011, a 50 year old farmer from the Surkadarya region, Ismoil Turanazarov, committed suicide as the result of the pressure and humiliations that he faced from the district governor and the local law

● http://www.lex.uz/Pages/GetAct.aspx?lact_id=103504 (retrieved on 09/19/2012)

enforcement agencies.● In his suicide note, the farmer wrote that he did not fulfill the plan due to the fact that the local authorities failed to comply with the terms of the contract, failing to provide him with farming machinery and fuel.

Suppression of information about forced labour

Under the authoritarian and repressive regime prevailing in Uzbekistan, human rights advocates and journalists have not been able to openly monitor the situation in the cotton fields during the harvest. The government of Uzbekistan has blocked all efforts to shed any light on this issue, bringing in the police, informants from local mahalla committees, teachers, and others to suppress efforts to collect information on forced labour in the cotton fields. In 2011, many teachers were instructed to be vigilant for the appearance of human rights activists and journalists in the fields where schoolchildren were working, and to say that the children were working with their families and then immediately report such incidents to their supervisors.

Schools and the facilities in which children live, as well as the fields in which they work, are secured and watched by law enforcement or special agents, so that the children do not communicate with outsiders. There were instances in which teachers chased away "outsiders" and called the police. According to parents surveyed, in Tashkent province, children were not permitted to take their mobile telephones with them to the fields, so that they would not be able to make use of the cameras to document their experience.

Despite the difficulties, several human rights activists and journalists in Uzbekistan managed to document numerous cases of child exploitation in the cotton fields. They were able to do so at a great cost. In September and October 2011, Elena Urlayeva, leader of the public movement "Rights Alliance of Uzbekistan" went out as a cotton picker to the fields where children were working. She handed to the country's authorities and to international organizations a written statement of the documented facts of individual schools and junior colleges, with the names of teachers and governors responsible for forcing children to pick cotton, that she supported with photos and videos that offered compelling evidence of the mass exploitation of children. The reaction

● Radio Ozodlik, 14.09.2011, http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/24328630.html (retrieved on 19.09.2012)

of the Uzbek authorities was to detain her and prevent her further attempts to monitor and gather information.

On October 19, 2011 the employees of the Yangiul district department of internal affairs of Tashkent province detained Elena Urlayeva at 10:00 in the morning while taking photographs and video of the empty school No 4. The human rights activist recalled: "The militia stripped me down, groped me looking for something. I wasn't informed of the reason why I was being detained. The documentation, despite my requests, was not presented to me. After three hours, I was taken through the back entrance of the police station, put into a car and brought to Tashkent". The human rights activist did not get back her memory stick with photos of the empty school.

And there have been other cases in which human rights defenders were detained merely for the fact that they went to a cotton field or tried to talk to students working in the fields. On September 15, 2011, human rights defenders from Kashkadarya, Gulshan Karaeva and Nodir Akhatov were detained by the police at the Kasan district police station after they were found conducting an interview with children in the fields. The police searched them, looking for memory sticks from their cameras and voice recorders. Gulshan Karayeva said that at the police station they were forced to write a note stating that they would no longer come to the Koson district. The human rights activists were released after being detained for nine hours.

School directors, under the threat of dismissal, demand that teachers not disclose any information about the exploitation of children. A teacher from middle school No 1 of Zabdar district in Jizzak region, Ziyodullo Razakov was dismissed from his job on January 12, 2012 after a series of radio interviews he gave to Radio Ozodlik on the working conditions that children were subject to and his protests against sending children to pick cotton. In his radio interview, the teacher described how the schoolchildren were sent to the cotton fields in trucks like "sacks of potatoes." And for this transportation, they had up to 400 soums withdrawn from their daily pay.

In response to growing international pressure, the Uzbek authorities have come up with a variety of formal events ostensibly to combat forced labour. For example, they have created a monitoring group that is comprised of representatives from state structures to travel around the country and monitor the situation during the cotton harvest season. In Uzbekistan, where the very same government agencies are those leading the process of forced labour, these measures are a bit absurd and are unreliable.

Conclusions and recommendations

Our research has shown that 2011 was not much different from previous years in terms of the use of forced labour of adults and children. From year to year, the length of time for which they take children, students and adults before they are returned back to their homes can vary, depending on the weather conditions. The policy of forced labour, however, remains the same.

In 2011 the Uzbek authorities attempted to shift the burden of forced labour from children to adults — junior college and university students, government workers, and workers in the private sector. For the first time in many years, students studying in the capital were sent to pick cotton. According to our observations to date, this trend intensified in 2012. This inadequate response is a reaction to international pressure and criticism regarding forced child labour. But in fact, the government is slow to change and does not show any progress in coming up with a real solution to the problem, as forced adult labour violates ILO Convention No 29 "On forced or compulsory labour" and No 105 "On the abolition of forced labour". Meanwhile, forced child labour is far from being over.

At the very least, the following categories of people are victims of the forced mobilization of citizens to pick cotton:

Schoolchildren mostly between the ages of 10 and 16 from rural areas and small towns, an estimated two million of them.

Students from junior colleges, lyceums, and universities, who are mobilized throughout the country with few exceptions. Altogether in this category, there are approximately 1,400,000 students.

Workers from state agencies and agencies and services in the social sector including academic, educational, medical, and other workers, are now mobilized throughout the country (until 2012, few from Tashkent were sent). We estimate that in this category, there are at least two million people mobilized, with trends indicating that even more will be mobilized this year and onward.

Farmers who grow cotton and grain and the majority of farmers who have no clout in local and regional government structures; there are about 80,000 farmers, and at least 50-60,000 of them are victims.

The number of direct victims of forced labour and the command economy in the cotton sector, by conservative estimates, is 5,260,000 people. This does not include their close relatives. Today in Uzbekistan, it is hard to find people who are not victims of this system. The only exceptions are high-ranking officials, business leaders, the leaders of the country, who skim a nice profit off of the export of cotton.

The Government of Uzbekistan has not taken any real action to eradicate forced labour beyond the formality of adopting new laws. Instead, the government continues to maintain a system in which forced cheap labour is critical to manage the cotton harvest. Forced labour in the cotton sector is the result of the centralized command system that has been established to manage this sector. The government has taken absolutely no steps to reform it in order to free farmers from administrative command.

Political will is the key condition that could change the situation. At present, laws and international conventions on human rights, particularly those related to forced and child labour, ratified by Uzbekistan remain a mere formality, and do not change anything in practice.

Every regional hokim understands that his/her personal career depends primarily on his/her willingness to perform any orders issued by the country's leadership on the delivery of cotton. None of this requires observation and implementation of the laws or international commitments. But if the cotton plan is not fulfilled, it could cost him / her his / her seat. There are numerous cases of hokims taking the heat for not delivering cotton, but there is not a single case in which a hokim suffered for sending children

and students to the cotton fields. In such an environment of repression, in which there are limited opportunities for local civil society to reach out to the government on behalf of the victims of forced labour, the situation can only change if consistent and meaningful international pressure is exerted on Uzbekistan's government. The Karimov regime will not change the existing system as long as it provides the regime profits, albeit at the expense of mass exploitation of the population, young and old. The regime profits from the wide discrepancies between world and domestic prices for cotton and between market and official currency exchange rates. The status quo will only change when the Karimov regime faces problems exporting cotton and sees lower cotton revenues. Thus, a boycott of Uzbek cotton and textiles today, if carried out either in full or, at least, in part, is likely the most effective way to end the system of forced labour in Uzbekistan.

We believe that the European Union and the United States need to take effective measures to pressure the government of Uzbekistan, including excluding Uzbekistan, its cotton and textiles from the General System of Preferences, which provides tax incentives for agricultural imports from developing countries. Under the current system of exploitation, the production of Uzbek cotton and textiles does not address the issue of poverty in Uzbekistan, but only makes it worse, by robbing hundreds of thousands of children and young people of their futures by curtailing their right to education.

We believe that retailers who buy products made of cotton textiles should exclude Uzbek cotton and cotton textiles known to use Uzbek cotton, including those producing yarn, pulp, and fabric from their supply chains, and to not lift this boycott until an ILO observation mission monitors the country and confirms that the practice of forced labour has indeed ended. We also hope that consumers of products made from Uzbek cotton will stop buying these products and demand that merchandisers provide guarantees that they do not supply cotton produced with the forced labour of children and adults.

To avoid condemnation and sanctions, foreign textile companies operating in Uzbekistan should conduct human rights due diligence in accordance with the Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Such due diligence at a minimum begins with independent monitoring of risks of violations of fundamental labour rights in the supply chain.

Only through such coordinated actions by the international community will there be a drop in the proceeds from Uzbek cotton, thus forcing the Government of Uzbekistan to get serious about reforming the cotton sector.

As for the government of Uzbekistan, it should demonstrate its commitment to bring its policies and daily practice into compliance with ILO core labour standards by inviting the ILO to send a tripartite, high level mission to monitor the cotton harvest and to avail itself to technical assistance from the ILO Secretariat, as recommended by the ILO tripartite supervisory body and the Committee on the Application of Standards. The government should also take serious steps toward dismantling the command-administrative system in the cotton industry that creates the demand for forced labour. That would require transforming the cotton sector from the system governed by punitive measures and administrative coercion into a system driven by economic incentives.

About us

The Uzbek-German Forum for Human Rights is a human rights NGO created in 2009 and based in Berlin, Germany. Its mission is to raise public awareness in Europe, especially in Germany, about the human rights situation in Uzbekistan and reach out to EU policymakers on behalf of Uzbek human rights activists and the victims of Uzbekistan' committee of self-governance, headed by a formally elected chairman, who receives a salary from the local hokimiyats repressive regime. We conduct monitoring of forced labour of adults and children in the cotton industry of Uzbekistan since 2010.

Glossary

Hokimiyat
local (district or provincial) administration, authoritarian in nature.

Hokim
head of the local administration. District hokim is appointed by the provincial hokim, and the provincial hokim is appointed by the president. Neither one nor the other is accountable to the local population.

Mardikor
day labourer

Mahalla
neighborhood community, the lowest level of the administrative system in Uzbekistan.

Mahalla Committee
committee of self-governance, headed by a formally elected chairman,
who receives a salary from the local hokimiyat.

SNB
National Security Services

Uzhloprom
the state agency that owns and steers most of cotton gains in the country and sign the cotton procurement contracts with the farmers on behalf of the state.

CABINET OF MINISTERS OF THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN, TASHKENT

Adopted on October 15th 2009, at 19:05

Nukus — Chairmen of Yukori Kengash and Council of Ministers of the Republic of Karakalpakstan;
Hokims of Andijan, Bukharo, Gulistan, Jizzak, Karshi, Namangan, Samarkand, Termez, Urgench, Fergana, Tashkent provinces and districts, General prosecutor of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Prosecutors of the Republic of Karakalpakstan and provinces,
Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan,
Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Karakalpakstan and the heads of the Departments of Internal Affairs of the provinces,
Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Karakalpakstan and heads of the Departments of Justice of the provinces.

Despite the timely provision to all districts and farming enterprises the necessary amount of material and technical resources, including fertilizers, fuel — lubricants, equipment, salaries for the timely cultivation and harvest of cotton this year, it is expected that several farming enterprises will not fulfill their contractual obligations to deliver the cotton harvest.

Despite repeated requests, many district hokims and heads of farm enterprises are not fully aware of how critical it is to collect the entire harvest of cotton to the very last box, which is first and foremost an additional revenue source and guarantor of economic effectiveness for farmers.

Therefore, starting tomorrow, for the purposes of meeting contractual obligations of the 2009 cotton harvest, in respect to each farm enterprise, it is required by all to execute the following activities:

- determine, as of October 15th of this year, the list of farms that have not fulfilled their contractual obligations for the sale of raw cotton;
- hold meetings separately with each farm that has not fulfilled the contractual plans for the sale of raw cotton; or effectively utilized every hour of good weather conditions, to organize, first and foremost, the collection to the last box, of their harvest;
- district hokims, district prosecutors offices and heads of district departments of internal affairs take under personal control in their jurisdictions the cotton harvest in their territory — of all raw cotton to the last box, as well as a complete collection of all harvests grown on the fields of farming enterprises, to fulfill their contractual obligations;
- develop a schedule for damages caused by farmers which have caused further damage due to their failure to fulfill their contractual obligations;
- it is necessary under the law to terminate agreements for the lease of land;
- through the court system, it is required to take measures to address any damages incurred by any farming enterprise unable to pay back any loans or credit that it has received to pay for material — technical resources.

Consider that as of today, the local leaders of the prosecutor's office and justice agencies are personally accountable for the organization and execution of the measures detailed above.

We ask that you ensure the implementation of the above measures, and to organize before November 1st of this year all coordination of work on the cotton harvest, and to submit information on a daily basis about its implementation to the Republican Cotton staff.

10/15/2009 Prime Minister
03/01-732 Republic of Uzbekistan

Sh. Mirziyoev